Forfeit

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Forfeit

by SummerJay

Summary

“What do you want, Alfie?”

The only reason Alfie glances at Tommy’s mouth that moment is because he brings the cigarette up again and wraps his lips around it, hollowing his cheeks as he takes the final deep drag. He probably lingers a second too long, because Tommy’s eyes snap down momentarily, and when they land on Alfie again, it’s a completely different expression Tommy’s wearing.

In which Tommy has to deal with his men's fuck-up and discovers many things about himself in the process. At some point, Alfie thinks it's about bloody time.

Notes

I wanted to toy with the space before they started fucking, all drama, denial and awkwardness included. So here we are, hope you enjoy!
Also, smut. Because of course there's smut.

Speak

The warehouse is in fucking shambles.

It's charred from ground to ceiling—what's left of it, at least—oozing the sickly concoction of foam, water and ash from every crack. Nasty fucking view to have, this early in the morning. On the far side, the roof was blown to shreds, and the newly formed gaping hole lets the bleak London sun illuminate the space with sinister greyness and spiky shadows of the jagged remnants of the carcass. It could be almost nice, this exterior. Spiritual and apocalyptic in a way. But now the damp blackened wood sucks any redeeming qualities right out of the building and leaves it cold, dead and hopeless.

Alfie takes one last look at it and grimaces, getting in the car.

"Back to the office, boss?" Ishmael asks, to which Alfie responds with a little more repetition and emphasis than strictly necessary.

He actually preferred the sight when it was all jolly and alight mere hours ago. There was a serene pocket of time then, while the firemen worked to preserve the area around more than the warehouse itself, since Alfie could do nothing but observe the chaotic nature of the world make yet another demonstration. He didn't know a thing back then. But he does now. And it leaves the same taste in his mouth as the stale scent of rotting wood and smoke.

It's barely past seven when he instructs Ollie to make the call. Tommy must've been up and about for some time now, because he picks up immediately, and Alfie tries his hardest not to get any more pissed off at the whole situation than he already is. He'll have to fucking deal with it now then. Fucking brilliant.

"He said he's on his way," Ollie appears in the door, and Alfie tears his eyes away from the record book that he isn't reading.

"Hm. Alright then. Go kick those brainless fuckers back into our world in an hour. Ollie-" he calls when Ollie starts to turn "-leave 'em intact for now, yeah? And tell David whatever I see on them, before Tommy Shelby arrives, yeah, I paint right back on his fucking face. With my own hands."

Ollie furrows his brow but nods. Smart lad when he wants to be.

The door closes, and Alfie throws the record book on the table and falls back on the chair, stroking his beard absently and watching the sun rise higher and higher in the small window. Wrong day in every fucking regard, except, it shouldn't be. Some months ago, he would've sunk his teeth into such a glaring opportunity to squeeze something more out of Tommy, just to see how far he could bend him without breaking. It's a goddamn mystery why things have changed, although Alfie's not quite delusional enough to claim he doesn't know *what* exactly has changed.

He decides to wait and see. There have not been many fuck-ups on Tommy's part in the past —none, in fact—and it makes him curious, despite the simmering irritation, to see what Tommy will offer.

. . .

For all Alfie's tendencies to run his mouth like hell, he's quite good at giving instructions, and, even more importantly, he's competent enough to get them obeyed. He reaps the fruits of this ability now, when Tommy strolls into his office, fuming with irritation and knowing absolutely bloody nothing.

"So. Where's the fucking fire?" Tommy asks as a way of greeting, letting the frustration into his voice, and it's not that he can't keep it locked away—he *chooses* to let Alfie see exactly where the fault with such scandalous disruptions of his morning routine lies.

Yes, that was definitely the right call to forbid Ollie to tell him anything over the phone.

Alfie looks up from the document he's been staring at, taking in the sight.

Despite the pointed lack of urgency in his movements and the spilling annoyance, Tommy came. He's sitting in Alfie's chair now, guarded and so utterly stripped of control it sends a rush down Alfie's spine. It suits him, this vulnerability. Makes him all sharp and volatile, and Alfie couldn't deny himself this even if he tried—he wants just another moment of it to roll in.

He holds up a finger, taking his sweet time marking completely random figures on the paper with the air of undivided concentration, and Tommy predictably huffs, taking out his cigarette pack.

It takes a few minutes of silence before Tommy's irritation starts threatening to break out, another minute he takes to wrench it under control. Alfie feels an infuriating urge to grin. Yeah, that's Tommy Shelby alright, from head to toe, and it was a rather long time going about without him; so long, in fact, that something angry and hot curls in Alfie's stomach at the necessity to deal with this ridiculous fucking situation right now instead of talking with Tommy like civilized people over a nice set of tea. Not that they've ever done that. Not that they will.

Right. Time for fucking business.

Alfie gives the paper one last dramatic swipe of the pen and looks up, propping his elbows on the tabletop and lacing his fingers under his chin.

"Chalton Street, actually," he says easily, and Tommy's hand pauses briefly halfway between the armrest and his lips. Alfie nods. "Yeah yeah, 's funny you should ask, mate, right, all that unsettling gypo foresight. You should've been a bookmaker or something."

“I prefer not to tempt fate,” Tommy deadpans.

Alfie realizes a tad too late his gaze still lingers on Tommy’s mouth and jerks it up. “Mm, gentlemanly of you. Well, it seems to me, right, that she’d been tempted long before your intervention, mate. Cause she’s supposed to watch over fools, don't she.”

Tommy exhales the smoke slowly. “That’d be God.”

There’s the thing about Tommy—he bounces Alfie’s bullshit right back at him. Alfie feels dangerously close to getting lost in the banter. Which, as an absolute and extremely vital rule, never happens to him. It doesn’t help that Tommy’s bristling demeanour is now gone and forgotten, switching the gears in his mind to prying, negotiating and doing all other kinds of wonderful things that Tommy manages all at once when he smells fire.

Fucking bloody hopeless, Alfie thinks with marginal disappointment directed at his very self and cuts to the chase.

“Right, those new arrivals you sent, yeah, two of ‘em, they blew up my fucking warehouse tonight, mate.” It sits in the air between them for a second, Tommy still and blank as a sheet. Technically, no explosion took place, but it’s the result that matters in these things, innit.

“They got drunk,” Alfie continues, punctuating every word, probably more to himself than to Tommy, and fixes Tommy with a gaze he calmly returns. “On duty. On their shift. And decided to ease the inexpressible burden of sitting on your arse doing nothing, right, by playing with matches like little boys.”

“Was there anyone else with them?” Tommy asks without missing a beat.

“No,” Alfie lies. “Who knew they needed fucking grownups for supervision, fuckin’ hell, Tommy.”

It’s almost cruel, this satisfaction, when Tommy’s face hardens momentarily. He isn’t buying a word of it, and frankly, Alfie’d be fucking insulted if he did, but there is suddenly an infuriating void of retorts at his disposal, that is if he doesn’t want to dig this hole deeper. Tommy knows this. And he looks at Alfie in a way that very clearly conveys that he knows.

Alfie watches him flick his thumb across the edge of the cigarette for a while. Probably contemplating if he should push, if he has any leverage and, if he does, what it would cost him to use it.

“The insurance-” he starts saying after a moment, and that won’t do at all, that is not where Alfie wants the balance to reside for now.

“Fuck the insurance,” he scoffs. “It’s just un-fucking-acceptable. You send me men, right, Tom, and I put them to work, right,” he gestures helpfully, “and now I’ll need to attach my man to each your man like some fucking queer Russian doll, is that it?”

Tommy quirks an eyebrow. “Your men are not without vices.”

“My men, mate, those I find logistically more difficult to lay off.”

It's an empty threat that Alfie half-heartedly expects to elicit a response. It doesn't. Tommy blinks at the wall, unaffected and unimpressed to the whole world, except for how he clenches his teeth. It makes his jawline even more acute, and that, well, that might set Alfie on edge a little. How others fall for Tommy's submissive charade is a goddamn mystery, because he seems utterly incapable of doing a thing with that cold piercing gaze that now ventures back to Alfie, not exactly shooting daggers but *cutting* alright. Alfie's tempted to scold him a little more, figures that's what drives him up the wall the most, just to draw a reaction. To see that fire spill over. He's tempted to do many fucking things.

"Well, mate, what I tell you? No man is without vices, yeah." He brings his hands back on the table, watching Tommy's eyes track the motion automatically. It's somehow getting the wrong sort of heated, this little domestic drama. Alfie resolves to ignore it for now. Needs to get to the fucking point. "Now, mate, can't say I understand a thing about your lot in that town, batshit crazy stuff you do, yeah. But for the sake of our shared human nature, right, flawed and all, I might be inclined to let it rest, so to speak, in the ashes."

"How fucking kind of you," Tommy says evenly. He resolutely maintains eye contact, and fucking hell, if that's his negotiations look, Alfie will blow his own bakery and find early retirement somewhere on the seaside.

That's a *kiss-with-a-blade-under-your-chin* kind of look. It's as if Tommy knows Alfie's provoking him and absolutely can't help it anyway.

Alfie realizes he got a little sidetracked and stopped talking altogether only when Tommy speaks up, on the exhale, a couple of long seconds later.

"What do you want, Alfie?"

The only reason Alfie glances at Tommy's mouth that moment is because he brings the cigarette up again and wraps his lips around it, hollowing his cheeks as he takes the final deep drag.

It'd be a fleeting look, if it were any other fucking day under the sun. But now Alfie finds himself strangely fixated on the picture. He probably lingers a second too long, because Tommy's eyes snap down momentarily, and when they land on Alfie again, it's a completely different expression Tommy's wearing.

Confusion. Inhale. Decision.

Then Tommy leans back on the chair and tips his head back slightly, suddenly almost bored.

Alfie normally prides himself on being a professional reader of men's minds—never women's but who the fuck is—and it still takes his powers a second to comprehend the sudden shift in the air.

"Well?" Tommy says, voice going lower than the intonation dictates, and deposits the cigarette stub on the edge of Alfie's desk. "Let's get it done."

Let's get what done, Alfie wonders, what the hell has Tommy got into his head this time, until, in a blazing, surreal moment, it hits him.

He realizes two things, to be precise, which would be three things if he chose to lie to himself about being oblivious to the very first one all this time.

He wants Tommy Shelby. He's wanted Tommy fucking Shelby for a rather inconveniently long time, rather desperately at that, and he's getting hard just sitting across the table from the arrogant fucker, because Tommy's irritated, Alfie's no better, and this whole thing suddenly looks much more appealing when he imagines it culminating in fucking rather than shooting. It's not a problem worth freaking out over, in Alfie's mind.

But the fucking, though, Tommy here thinks it to be the payment. That is the second thing.

What do you want, Alfie?

Alfie starts moving before reasoning manages to stop him—and not like it's a rare occurrence. He circles the table, led by a sudden angry impulse to push, see if Tommy would actually go through with it, cause that, right, that wasn't what Alfie meant by that fucking stray gaze at all. But it's burning right through him, now that it's on the table.

Tommy looks up at him through his long dark lashes and stays just like he is, open and tense. Tenser still as Alfie shuffles into his space, squeezes between him and the table, legs touching. For a second, he's so stiff it feels like he'll shatter, like a fucking ice statue, from the mere touch.

But Tommy doesn't move. He blinks slowly and breathes heavily in the sudden silence, solidifying Alfie's third insight.

Tommy Shelby would let him.

Alfie's heart is pumping molten lead through his veins, and it's simultaneously heavy and unconscious when he brings his hand down and strokes Tommy's cheek, taking a hold of his jaw to tip his head even further back.

To shock him out of this glazed state he seems to be sinking into. To touch him. To push him until he does break, because this is just a stupid fucking assumption to make that Tommy would whore himself out for business, not to another man.

But Tommy doesn't move at all. He seems to be falling in the precise opposite direction of Alfie's whirling thoughts, going more wide eyed and *responsive*, and, by the looks of it, almost fucking surprised. At what exactly, Alfie can't begin to contemplate.

Tommy lets him maneuver his head up and stares back, unblinking, pupils blown like spilled gunpowder against the bright blue. Alfie swipes a finger along his cheekbone. Tommy doesn't bolt. Alfie steps closer, kicking Tommy's knees apart, watching every muscle twitch on his face, waiting, *nearly fucking snapping*-

But Tommy doesn't bolt.

He draws a shaky breath instead and says, with what sounds miles away from cold indifference, “I don’t have all day. Get a fucking move on.”

Alfie barely holds himself back from slapping him, because what in all circles of hell does that boy think of him. Tommy’s not a complete fucking idiot, after all. He must understand Alfie, among all the things that he is, is not *that* kind of a man. But here they are.

Alfie suddenly becomes acutely aware of his fingers on Tommy’s skin. Funny how this particular setting—Tommy under his hands, under him, with eyes burning and lips parted so prettily—would put him in a much less conflicted and a much more aroused state just a day ago. Just a fucking hour ago.

Which is not to say he’s not aroused. He’s fucking aching. But Tommy doesn’t want it now, except as a retribution for the cock-up Alfie can’t even clearly recall at the moment.

Alfie drops his hand so quickly, Tommy’s head bounces slightly before he catches himself. More confusion. Darting eyes, calculating what he’s done wrong. It’s not particularly difficult to return behind the desk, although Alfie’s body is screaming at him to come back, pull Tommy to his feet, tear that coat off and make Tommy come so hard he’ll be only able to see complete fucking darkness for minutes.

But as Alfie sinks into the chair, the picture of the guarded, enduring void in Tommy’s eyes makes him shudder with disgust.

Jesus Christ.

“What-” Tommy begins and stops when his voice fails him. He clears his throat, miles and miles away, composed and distant once again, and Alfie doesn’t even want to look at him now, isn’t sure it won’t shower from his eyes or something.

“Reckon a bakery in Birmingham would be fine,” he blurts out, inevitably turning to watch Tommy as he draws his eyebrows together. “Fine location, innit, secluded, far from any semblance of law or morality, yeah?”

“A bakery.” Tommy swallows, clearly trying to be inconspicuous about it and failing.

“Right, a small one, from your pocket and all. Would serve your men well, to learn some bloody discipline. Could relocate those two excuses for workforce of yours there, spare us all the necessity to behold their fucking faces.”

Alfie doesn’t need a bakery in Birmingham. Hell, of all the things he hoped to get out of this whole ordeal, this wasn’t even remotely close to the list.

He fumbles with his rings absently while Tommy gets busy picking himself up and straightening his coat.

He considers saying something. Easy and dismissive, something along the lines of ‘nah, you misread it, mate,’ which would be simple enough and also absolutely fucking ballistic,

because admitting anything out loud at this point feels like a death sentence in neat handwriting—very tiny and very lethal.

By the mortified look gliding across Tommy's face for a second as he swipes a hand over his face, he knows damn well he misread it.

"Right," Alfie mutters to himself and then repeats, loudly enough to shake the whole damn building, "Right. So it's settled then, yeah, no hard feelings. With the bakery, that is."

"Right," Tommy echoes. He sounds strange, almost lost, although it would've been impossible to notice if Alfie'd known him any less.

When Tommy goes to leave, Alfie doesn't stop him, although the impulse, for some fucking reason, is there.

He slumps down in the chair, draws a long, deep breath and tries to process what has just transpired. In particular, what that look on Tommy was, right before he gracefully stormed out of his own fucking shipwreck.

Alfie can't seem to find a place for his hands; he keeps shifting around, the persistent sensation of rough stubbled skin under his fingertips unchanging despite the position, until he jolts upright and grabs the cigarette that witnessed all this chaos with dead silence.

Alfie's powers are suddenly kicking back in to tell him the fucking look was one of disappointment. Which is complete and impossible bloody horseshit. Unless, of course, it isn't. And in that case, opening a bakery in Birmingham is a bad, *bad* idea.

See

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Time passes, as it usually does. Specifically, fifty-two hours pass, give or take, which is still not remotely enough for what's currently happening. Alfie loosens his grip on the earpiece—as if Tommy could bloody see him, for fuck's sake—fully determined to conceal how perplexed he is.

"Right, I'm not staying the night, am I?"

Two seconds of silence.

"You wouldn't need to stay the night."

"Good, mate, yeah, works for me. Wouldn't wanna mess with this bunch in the evening, would I. Hear they get even more fucking feral in the dark. Start feasting on your flesh, cause your soul, right, they've already got it sucked out of ya by then."

"They're lawyers."

"So what, that supposed to imply they can't be bloody insufferable, hm?"

Tommy smirks just a little, it's right there in his voice somehow, although nothing fundamentally changes.

"That implies they must be."

Alfie hums, imagining the slight quirk of the lips brushing against the receiver on the other end of the line.

"Right, mate, we got a deal. Tomorrow it is."

"Good." And then, with the same phenomenal calmness, "Goodnight, Alfie."

"Yeah, very fucking timely, mate."

Tommy hangs up before Alfie can evolve the argument into a lengthy educational session regarding the ethics of calling someone's home at midnight and proceeding to ask why it took them so long to get to the telephone within the first three seconds of the conversation. He could even fit a section concerning unexpected invitations of particular urgency somewhere in there. There are so many things about Tommy's manners, in fact, desperately needing fixing that Alfie could spend all damn night doing just that.

Which is an interesting thought. And Alfie steers clear of it, ignoring the sudden goosebumps on the back of his neck.

He lets the book he's been holding for the past five minutes sit idly on his lap, giving up on trying to make sense of the letters in front of him.

No, it's not the fucking manners that have him all vexed up, innit, it's the conversation part of it. The one where Tommy called first—just fifty-two bloody hours later—and used his mouth for the purpose of speaking instead of making everyone around feel inferior with its expression. It was stiff and awkward, sure, that much was to be expected from both sides. But the point stands—Tommy talked.

Alfie would say it was shockingly mature, this whole unimaginable feat. But he's not smitten enough yet to be that stupid. No.

Tommy's fucking planning something.

. . .

Tommy Shelby and his unsettling fucking offer succeeds in keeping Alfie occupied and progressively more peeved throughout the night and into this blessed day, which now properly begins with Ishmael stopping the car in front of Alfie's house.

It wasn't a particularly strange offer, in fact. Come to Birmingham, take a look at the potential location for the distillery. Proper and business-like. Alfie didn't think twice, after spending the whole flaming eternity trying to navigate the implications of having your legal warehouse that was storing your illegal liquor burnt down. Hell, he had enough bureaucracy on his hands to instigate rather distasteful bloodshed. Seeing Tommy's face wasn't exactly what he'd call a torturous alternative.

He must be thinking too loudly at this point, because Ishmael finally stops worrying his lip with his teeth and darts his eyes to Alfie once, before saying, "It's just a day away, nothing will happen. It's all in competent hands back there."

"Competent hands," Alfie scoffs and starts talking, because he can multitask, thank you very much. "You hear that word in my bakery? The fancy one? Tell you what, the only thing they're *semi-competent* with there, right, is making things worse than they could've got in the first place, yeah, without their extremely helpful assistance."

Ishmael shrugs a little and takes the turn towards the familiar wide street, shutting the engine off in the middle of it.

"Some things manage to happen without your direct supervision, Alfie."

And that gets Alfie for a second, by sheer surprise. He turns to Ishmael, finally back in the world, and raises both eyebrows at his innocent expression. Knows full well, the fucker, that he's one of the very few who's occasionally allowed shit like that.

“Fuckin’ hell, mate, you got an extra fucking life, do you? Unbelievable,” Alfie says, feeling the tension melt off him that instant, as if something broke the singular focus he’d held on the situation and cleared his head. He reaches for the handle, noting how easily his leg moves. Must be a good day. “No fucking discipline. Talking to me about fucking competence, are you, that was you a second ago, Ishmael, ‘m not mistaking, am I. How are you even employed in this enterprise, bloody hell.”

Ishmael never quite smiles, serene as always, climbing out of the car to join Alfie.

“I have a considerate employer, sir.”

On second thought, it was a mistake taking him. Alfie realizes it now, a tad too late, when he finally takes stock of the grey street ahead and makes out a lonely figure staring at them impassively as they approach.

Tommy’s leaning on his car and smoking, as if it were no big deal for him in the slightest to wait up on anyone. Not disturbing at all. Considering, Tommy doesn’t wait up, as a rule, and when it comes to Alfie, he won’t emerge even when he sees him through the window, just to make a point of being more *needed* , until the endless and hellish shrill of the car’s honk forces him outside. Alfie doesn’t mind the routine, he finds it sort of amusing.

This now—this he finds concerning.

Tommy doesn’t bother unfolding his arms from his chest, offering an icy, patient expression instead of a handshake. It makes him smaller, this pose, now that he’s not wearing his coat.

Something curls deep in the pit of Alfie’s stomach, nagging and fluttering.

Ishmael frowns to Alfie’s right, he sees it without taking his eyes off Tommy—bloody fucking *can’t* if he’s perfectly honest—and it’s, possibly, officially the day of idiotic decisions now. Because Ishmael has always been too perceptive for his own good. And it’s just tension, Alfie logically understands, it’s not something inherently unusual between him and any of his business partners, except his heart doesn’t seem to give a fuck, setting to breaking his ribcage with admirable fervor.

Right, they’re not fucking doing it here, Alfie decides and almost opens his mouth to speak, when Tommy beats him to it.

“Good morning, Alfie,” he says, and it sounds somehow so clearly like “you’re late” that Alfie just can’t contain himself.

“Yeah, it is, mate, indeed it is.” He shoves his free hand into the coat pocket and puts more wait on the cane. “We couldn’t resist taking a couple o’ extra laps, round your lovely town, you know, just to savour it.”

Tommy blinks slowly, and there is no reason for Alfie to know it’s Shelby’s equivalent of a slight grin, but he does.

Tommy casts a single glance to Ishmael before pushing away from the car and discarding the cigarette without finishing it. He looks composed in a way that suggests particular attention, as if he'd tried his best to construct this exact sort of blank and cold nonchalance before he stepped out of his front door, to repress his natural jitteriness. It makes his movements stiff. Too subtle for anyone to notice, but Alfie's hardly anyone.

"I'll drive if you don't mind," Tommy says, and that is the first good idea in the whole bloody day. "They're already waiting for us."

"It's not like they'd leave, is it. Just 'cause you're late."

There, something real finally breaks through and flickers in Tommy's eyes.

"No," he says with a slight, cold curl to his lips. "But we'd have to show up at some point."

Alfie doesn't need to contemplate it for long. It makes no sense to go in two separate cars; hell, given the dimensions of Birmingham, one is often redundant. And there is also a prospect of getting to see Tommy up close and personal, watch him act without anyone else around, and while Alfie doesn't specifically *yearn* for it—that would be too fucking indignant, wouldn't it—he would positively, decisively not mind such an arrangement.

"Alright," he agrees, shrugging a little, enough for anyone watching to know his heartbeat doesn't give a particularly violent spike, and instructs Ishmael to wait around before getting in Tommy's car.

. . .

It takes less than three minutes for the peculiar, handcrafted balance between them to blow like a house of cards at one careless exhale. Alfie's been counting. Three minutes since he slammed the door shut, and Tommy started driving, hands gripping the wheel tighter and tighter until his knuckles lost all colour, completely at odds with the still calm, detached expression on his face.

Thank God, Alfie thinks when the awkwardness ripples through him like a gush of water up the diver's nose. At least some things he still knows.

It's a short and silent ride. Tommy doesn't contribute anything, doesn't even try to maintain the semblance of normality anymore, and Alfie doesn't feel like making it easier for him. He suddenly remembers that the whole thing, from start to finish, is actually Tommy's bloody fault.

The silence must look especially intimidating on him. No remarks are made when they stop in front of a large desolate building with two visibly disgruntled men by the entrance. They blink in unison as Tommy and Alfie climb out of the car—after Alfie leaves his cane behind on a whim—and march to the door side by side, with a careful two feet between them.

“Mr. Shelby,” one of them utters, more cheerful by the second, while the other one has the nerve to glance at his watch. Alfie observes with some primal satisfaction as the man’s eyes widen when he looks up and realizes Alfie knows exactly what he’s doing.

Tommy doesn’t have any problem either getting the keys or persuading the wankers to go about their day instead of lurking by the door.

Not that it would be an issue if they did, would it? Nevermind the increasing tension in Tommy’s shoulders when they enter, which definitely always comes when he needs to take a tour of a new building, it’s one intimidating fucking task after all, innit. It’s not like they’re planning on doing something inappropriate. Alfie would’ve got an update on that sort of thing, wouldn’t he? No they’re just looking round the fucking building.

A nice building at that, Alfie has to admit through the bubbling irritation. All high ceiling and wide space, dusty, empty and echoing. It smells dry, crisp with chilly air. No visible rot to the walls, no rat holes in the floorboards. At first sight, it fits.

“So,” Tommy says and clears his throat. It reverberates off the walls, low and hushed. “What do you think?”

“‘s fine, it is,” Alfie nods. “Pity we’re not really here for it, eh Tommy.”

Alfie hears—doesn’t turn to look—when Tommy takes a shaky breath and fishes out a cigarette. He doesn’t try to ask what the fuck Alfie means. Small mercies.

Tommy’s presence is somehow more pronounced now, in the glaring absence of anything else around. There are four walls and vibrating space between them. The door is closed. They’re achingly alone.

It should be fucking simple, Alfie thinks with sudden exasperation, it’s not that complicated to say whatever Tommy needs to say to ensure they never revisit his little stunt back at the office. This is what it’s about, after all, isn’t it. Doesn’t warrant dragging Alfie through all the fucking drama just because Tommy operates under the delusion that he can will away any feeling that slips through the cracks in his steely mind. Not that Alfie knows what exactly on God’s green earth Tommy is repressing this time. But the sour look on his face—when Alfie finally does look—signals loud and clear it’s not *nothing*.

Fucking hell.

They’re not *talking* about it for fuck’s sake, God forbid. But they’re damn well dealing with it, one way or another.

“I had a weird dream tonight, you know,” Alfie starts saying, watching the smoke dissolve in the scarce sunlight breaking through the windows. “Some business associate of mine, right, he called my house. In the middle of the night, like that was his God given right, not an ounce of shame in that head, mind you. And he summoned me, right, to his little town, on account of having some very important business to discuss.”

They start walking towards the far side of the hall now, where the hollow vastness gives way to a corridor and several office rooms tucked at the sides.

Tommy halts his step as they take the turn, and Alfie follows suit, finally fixing him with a steady gaze.

Tommy looks contemplative more than anything. He's smoking slowly, flickering his eyes across Alfie's face. Calmer now that he's out of the exposing openness.

"What did he want to discuss?" he asks in a fit of unexpected engagement.

Alfie doesn't fully catch it when he his legs carry him a small step forward.

"Well, that's the problem, mate, innit, he was fucking tight 'bout it."

It must be the narrow corridor warping the space of the whole building, Alfie decides, because the distance between them suddenly shrinks, to the point of Alfie noticing the freckles on Tommy's nose, and he couldn't have shuffled that close.

Tommy swallows.

"Right, spit it out, mate."

Alfie aims for brisk, but the words come out rushed, and it should—it really fucking should be baffling and unforeseen when Tommy throws the cigarette to the ground, takes a small breath and kisses him, but it just fundamentally *isn't*.

There's nothing proper about this kiss, if Alfie has any say. Tommy just lunges forward one moment and smashes their mouths together, as if he resolved to launch forward and never managed to stop his body, and then he freezes for a second. Right as he is, fucking *freezes*, lips pressed to Alfie's, hard and sure, eyes half-open. He's not moving and not retreating. Almost vibrating with tension, expecting Alfie to stumble back, punch him, or for the apocalypse to finally befall them, fuck if Alfie knows, but he's still stubbornly determined to go through with it, see it to any end.

Fuck, Alfie thinks. Bloody fuck.

He leans away, just enough for the blue of Tommy's eyes to come back into focus.

There's something to be said about seeing things you've only dared imagine before and discovering they're nothing like the shallow, superficial picture of them in your mind. There are many intricate things to say, books of bloody poems, yeah, in thousands of languages. Alfie, for once, doesn't say shit. He traces Tommy's bottom lip with his thumb and *looks*.

The slow drag of the rough skin makes him shudder, throat flexing involuntarily. Tommy's flushed. It's barely tinting his skin, high on the sharp cheekbones, but it's enough with his paleness to look almost feverish. *Obscene*, Alfie thinks, that's the word, the only word right now for Tommy's reddening mouth, chest rising heavily, intent and fear whirling in his eyes, fighting each other to make him look away and stare defiantly back.

He stares.

It should at least have the decency to feel underwhelming.

But no. Nothing's easy for Alfie in this world.

His insides are suddenly on fire, and there's an impatient tremble in his fingers when he brings their bodies closer, and then closer still, until Tommy's back connects with the wall. It's not entirely intentional, they just start moving in tandem, Alfie swaying forward, and Tommy taking none too careful steps back while he fists his hands in Alfie's shirt, removing every other option for him but to follow.

Alfie kisses him then—actually *kisses* him, and Tommy's lashes flutter against his skin.

Stupid, Alfie thinks. Beautiful, fucked up, stupid moron, too blind to see there's no other option on the table, never been, there's exactly one particular drop to which the pool of possible outcomes will drain each single time, regardless of what Alfie consciously deems to be the right action. He doesn't have to think twice about it—doesn't have to think at all, before his mouth moves against Tommy's, wet and insistent.

It's hungry, with hands wandering and tongues clashing, and Tommy practically gasps in Alfie's mouth when Alfie slides a hand inside his jacket, smoothing the palm over the soft fabric of his shirt.

He's shivering like a leaf. Bloody hell, when was the last time Tommy even fucking touched someone for reasons unrelated to business? That must be it, right, cause Alfie's not so full of himself to assume he's the one entirely responsible for this kind of reaction.

Tommy's composure is nonexistent when they separate. He's panting, inching away unconsciously, and Alfie curls one hand round the back of his neck, stroking the skin behind his ear. Not letting him get away.

"Been some time?" Alfie blurts out, can't seem to get a grasp on his tongue, and Tommy glares at him.

"Shut up."

"Yeah, right, so what if I will?"

Tommy blinks at him, eyes flickering to his lips. Alfie's not entirely right in the head, on account of not having nearly enough blood there at the moment, but he can swear on all that's holy that he spots the moment when Tommy's mind starts blaring red, making him tighten his grip on Alfie's shirt.

He's completely fucking clueless. He's never thought of anything past the kiss.

"See you're doing great there, yeah, mate, without my input?" Alfie never moves the hand on Tommy's neck—not when Tommy draws in a frantic breath every time he flicks his thumb across that sensitive spot—but lets the other one travel down, feeling Tommy's stomach draw in at the touch. "I should just leave now, then, shouldn't I. Since our business here-" one of

Tommy's hands darts to Alfie's shoulder and grips it when Alfie unbuckles his belt "-is clearly very much concluded."

There must be something in the phrasing, because Tommy's eyes turn glassy for a moment, before he exhales sharply and buckles his hips when Alfie finally manages to work a hand into his trousers and take a hold of him.

It would be wise to dissect that glimpse of something. But Alfie's so hard it *hurts*, and if Tommy still has some inner struggles, he can bloody well make it known, without relying on Alfie's telepathic abilities. Which are currently telling him that Tommy's rather invested in what's happening, judging by how his cock jumps in Alfie's hand, hot and heavy and begging for attention.

So fucking worked up already, bloody hell, makes Alfie's head swim with the sudden need to drag it out. He strokes up the length slowly and twists his hand, rubbing his palm over the leaking head, keeps it there with barely any pressure. *Grazing*. Promising.

"Fuck-" it's so quiet it barely leaves Tommy's lips. He jerks his hips mindlessly, trying to get some friction, nails leaving deep imprints on Alfie's shoulders.

Alfie can't bloody help it then, he mirrors the motion, and Tommy meets his thrust, *fucking hell*, arching his back and sliding his hand up to tug at Alfie's hair, drawing him impossibly closer.

"Fuck, Tommy-"

"C'mon," Tommy hisses, and it's audible this time, and Alfie bites into his mouth, catching a stifled gasp, because it's the only thing in the world he can do right now.

If only they had more time, he thinks, finally setting a faster pace and diligently fucking his tongue into Tommy's mouth. God, if they had more time, he'd get Tommy to *cry* with the intensity of it. He'd spend hours taking him apart, no fucking rush at all, until the only thing Tommy could do was moan and beg, which is an implausible prospect with how incredibly vocal Tommy is, but Alfie's confident to no end for some goddamn reason that he'd manage to get Tommy there, and he'd manage to *keep* Tommy there, for as long as it'd take him to forget about every single fucking thing in the world.

It doesn't take any time at all. Tommy's rocking into his fist one moment, mouth silent and agape against Alfie's lips, and then every muscle in his body seems to lock up when he spills all over Alfie's hand, eyes falling closed.

"There you go, love," Alfie mutters, "so fuckin' beautiful you are."

Alfie strokes him through it, nice and gentle, until Tommy tips his head back, pressing it against the wall with a small sigh, and grasps at Alfie's hand weakly. Alfie presses a kiss into his exposed throat, tucks him back in. It makes Tommy twitch. God, it makes Alfie twitch in his trousers, but it somehow doesn't feel like the right idea to continue. Just a hunch, something lingering in the back of Alfie's mind, seeping through the haze of arousal.

He tells Tommy as much when he reaches to return the favour.

“Nah, treacle, we’ll be late, won’t we. That was just for you.”

Tommy stares.

“Fuck’s that, Alfie?” he sounds hoarse, as if he were screaming all this time, which… well, fuck, it shakes Alfie’s resolution.

He takes a careful step back, watching Tommy to find his balance.

“Yeah, mate, been wanting to do that for some time haven’t I,” he finds it in him to shrug and adds, because his mind finally connects the dots, “Not always a transaction these things, are they.”

“Fuck off.”

“Yeah, mate, in a minute.”

It’s only because Tommy’s moving with the finesse of a junkie trying to insert a key in the lock when he reaches for his cigarettes, that Alfie’s not absolutely bristling with anger yet. He’ll have the time to do that later. Not fucking looking forward to it, but he hardly controls these things.

For now, he can’t help but stare—openly and unabashedly at that—to burn the image into his brain.

He can get Tommy Shelby all hot and quivering. What a fucking revelation.

Tommy pretends not to notice his gaze, cups a hand around the lighter. Never the one to admit a thing, and already choking on embarrassment. He’s noticed, Alfie knows for a fact, because the redness on his neck has nothing to do with Alfie’s touch.

“Your choice,” he states after a long drag, aiming for nonchalant, and Alfie bites back a grin. Won’t do much good now, that. He huffs instead.

“It is, mate, isn’t it.”

“Alright then.”

“You good with it?”

Tommy doesn’t look at him. “What the fuck do I care?”

They proceed to walk back, exactly the way they came in, except now Alfie’s exasperation has a defined shape, and Tommy’s clothes are in a slightly more pitiful state.

“Well, mate, can’t tell what you bloody wanted out of it. Don’t wanna be selfish, and all that.” By the time they get in the car, Alfie’s pretty sure he knows exactly what Tommy wanted out of it.

Did you fucking get it, he thinks bitterly.

Tommy looks at him then, just once, putting on his brave face, and the fear in his eyes is so badly masked this time, Alfie wants to scrape the cruelty out of his words instantly. Which is just ridiculous. He shoves clever ideas back where they came from and stares back.

“Selfish,” Tommy says, quirking an eyebrow and starting the car. “That’d be a new experience for you, eh?”

Un-fucking-believable.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not entirely happy with this one, but there was a point when the amount of rewriting started getting ridiculous. So here we are. Thank you for your lovely comments on the previous chapter, they literally kept me alive throughout this mess!

Feel

The silence that imbues the ride back to Alfie's car is diplomatic. Normally, Alfie has little appreciation for this manner of interaction, but now he starts seeing it as less of a whimsical desire to avoid confrontation and more of an attempt to divert a potential massacre. Or an international conflict. Or a sequence of both, which is probably slightly exaggerated, but who can blame him, really? Tommy has that glassy look in his eyes that cuts anyone standing too close when it finally breaks. As if any of this is Alfie's fucking fault.

Alfie maintains this silence until he switches cars and slams the door shut before Thomas can get any ideas about shaking his hand. That would fuck the diplomacy a little, Alfie reckons.

"The building's fine," he says through the open window as Ishmael starts the car, because they do need to bid a goodbye *somehow*. Then, as the sting in his chest finally gets to his brain, Alfie adds, "All that rich history of debauchery going on there, I'd wager that must be good for the spirit, yeah, of this whole enterprise."

Tommy's hand freezes with a cigarette halfway out of the pack. He gives Alfie a scorching cold look, muscles on his jaw flexing as he clenches his teeth and says nothing, equal parts stunned and icy. There's a hint of red starting to creep onto his cheeks. Ishmael starts driving, and Tommy's out of sight before Alfie can figure out if the blush was only in his imagination.

How Tommy fucking dares wearing that expression of *warning* so shamelessly is beyond Alfie. That's a new grade of arrogance, and it's almost fascinating that Tommy never ceases to be impressive in that regard. If only Alfie felt inclined to be fascinated.

Seconds keep trickling away heavily, as if Tommy were still there—which is fucking magnificent that he isn't—and Alfie stares dispassionately at the curving road ahead, channeling the rising heat from his mind into his fingers, crushing the head of the cane.

He tries to make himself feel good about winning that last round. He only gets angrier instead.

. . .

Alfie locks himself in the office as soon as they get to the bakery. He needs a minute—to think, to breathe, fucking pace from wall to wall without catching odd looks from his piss poor excuses for employees. It feels like he'll explode if he doesn't shed some of the bristling anger clouding his vision with familiar splashes of red by now.

It's been a long-ass drive. Too much forced stillness to feed the raging thoughts and dawning realizations, all pertaining to the actions of one selfish bastard whose name Alfie's trying hard to wipe out of his memory right this moment. If at the warehouse, Alfie was baffled and

then incapable of rational thought altogether, now Tommy's ferocious determination and calculated, planned coldness afterwards are becoming painfully obvious.

Alfie cracks his knuckles, forcing himself to sit down at last.

Tommy never got past that day. He wallowed in misery and—Alfie likes to think, cruelly—panic over his reaction until, using his inexhaustible supply of natural brilliance, he decided to give himself closure in the only way his capable mind managed to identify. At Alfie's expense.

Alfie sits there for another minute. Then, he gets his hat and strides out of the office.

It's a long day, but when the evening finally rolls in, Alfie has his mind set, thanks to the hours of pondering and weighing his options. He delegates the driving duty to David this time—he's learned his fucking lesson—and names the address that's still new on his letters.

If Tommy wants to be a fucking coward, that's not Alfie's headache in the slightest, after all, is it.

. . .

The maid looks at him with a puzzled expression when Alfie explains that yes, he is here to see Mr. Shelby, and no, he does not have an appointment, because Mr. Shelby is such an old friend of his that they're already way past those tedious formalities, not to mention this matter is entirely besides the concern of a maid.

In truth, he ought to be dwelling on how ridiculous and just this side of desperate his visit probably appears. And he does—for the full four minutes it takes the maid to lead him through the endless hallways and carpet-lined rooms of Tommy's newly acquired palace of a house. But then Alfie enters what seems to be Tommy's office, and his brain, still winded, takes a completely different direction.

The room is orderly and warm, the first one in the house that feels like a human being frequents it with their presence. And there is a desk at the far wall.

It's a nice desk if Alfie's seen one, a sturdy but elegant thing, all black wood and polished smoothness. Stood by the wide window, it intimidates anyone who enters the room, instilling the weight of its owner, flaunting his absolute power within these walls with shameless abandon.

Alfie wants to fuck him against this desk. Better yet—on it. Pressing Tommy's face ruthlessly down and watching his gaping mouth streak the shining surface with the fog of his frantic breathing. He'd make sure Tommy came all over it too. Bent over, pinned by Alfie's broader frame, stubbornly defiant even as he'd spill on those neat stacks of his dignified work.

Alfie's cock twitches at the mental image.

Where the fuck *is* Tommy? Won't be a surprise if he gets lost, a massive eerie place it is, but Alfie's composure hinges on the sole grip of his maturity, right, and the necessity to settle this small misunderstanding in a civilized manner. Well, in some manner, at least.

He's leaning on the table, still making a feeble attempt to tuck his irritation behind his folded hands, when the door finally flies open. Tommy doesn't spare him a glance before he closes it —with more purpose than the frame can stand without creaking.

This is going to be fun, isn't it.

Tommy stops a few paces into the room, regarding Alfie with a cold stare. He's lost his collar and jacket already but not the holster. The gun sits snugly against his ribs, sharp and cheeky coupled with that black wool waistcoat that does wonders to Alfie's patience. Tommy's fucking handsome like this, even with that edgy expression he's wearing, and there's absolutely nothing to be done about it.

"What is it?" he demands, not coming any closer.

Alfie contemplates if there is any chance Tommy would decide to actually make use of that gun this evening. Wouldn't put it past him.

"Altruism," he says, watching Tommy's eyes go stormy. "See, mate, Ishmael was introducing us all to this fine term the other week, he's nose deep in his fucking books I tell you, and he drags us all down that spiritually replenishing spiral whenever he opens his mouth. So there you know it. When you drive at night in this ungodly direction, into some fucking woods and fields, right, and your mate smashes you face-first into this stellar hospitality, then you know not to expect anything for your good heart. That's altruism right there."

If Tommy's hand twitched in the middle of Alfie's speech, it's only now that he brings it up to his side and levels the gun accurately at Alfie's head.

Alfie can't help it—he rubs a hand over his face.

"Tommy, sweetie, tell me you're not really fucking serious right now."

Tommy steps closer, breaking his shielding detachment, eyes fiery.

"You dare-" he starts and doesn't get to finish before the door opens again, and Alfie turns to it instinctively while Tommy keeps his eyes glued to him, hand steady.

Alfie stares right past the barrel of the gun, across the room where one mortified face starts losing colour at a rather alarming rate.

"'ello there," he offers the maid a small polite nod.

She's an elderly one, God help them. And though she looks less likely to keel over than Tommy with his bottled emotional firework currently is—which is fucking phenomenal in itself, Alfie will give her that—he doesn't fancy dealing with this shit tonight.

Tommy visibly represses a sigh.

“Frances, close the door,” he says evenly.

Frances doesn’t concede. She blinks, tearing her eyes away from the weapon, gliding them over Alfie momentarily before turning to Thomas and folding her hands on her apron.

“Mr. Shelby, there is a telegram waiting, it is marked urgent.” Her voice barely trembles when she speaks. “You asked to inform you of such things immediately.”

“Frances,” Tommy repeats slowly. Heavily. Voice finally going hard and sharp around the edges. It makes Alfie want to hear him say very different things. “Close the fucking door.”

Good, timely idea, Alfie thinks, and Frances, apparently catching up on the shift in the atmosphere, decides that the overall mundane occurrence in the household is less mundane this evening. In short, she fucks off.

“You were saying mate?” Alfie prompts when the door closes, because there’s something deeply annoying about having a gun in the face, and he wants to move things along regardless of the direction.

Tommy takes a deep breath. To Alfie’s watchful eye, his resolution to actually pull the trigger wavered when Frances barged in. But he doesn’t lower the gun now, ever so fucking defiant.

“You don’t get to break into my house.” Tommy finally spits, and it goes straight to Alfie’s head, this one. “The fuck’s wrong with you? Eh? What’s this fucking show on for?”

Those are the wrong words.

“The fuck’s wrong with me, yeah?”

The next twenty seconds occur in silence. Tommy doesn’t yelp, just gasps when Alfie covers the distance between them in three large strides, snatches the gun from his hand, launching it across the room, and grabs Tommy’s throat as he pushes him bodily backwards until his head hits the door.

Now, *this* is a properly conversational position.

“The fuck’s wrong with *my* fucking head, right, Tommy?”

“Fuck off-” Tommy flails helplessly, eyes widening in instinctual panic when he fails to inhale. It’s a gorgeous sight that Alfie won’t miss for the life of him: Tommy grasping at his hands fruitlessly, fighting on pure impulse and adrenaline. His notorious loathing for life is out the window the second his body takes over, reducing him to a desperate heaving mess.

Alfie gives him a moment to feel it properly. Choke on it.

“The fuck’s wrong with *my* fucking head, yeah, that can’t wrap my wits ‘round what I fucking want so bad it dumps it on my business partners, ‘s that right?” It’s burning, burning right through him, the anger mixing foully with bitterness, and Alfie fights to keep his grip light enough not to actually choke the wanker. “The fuck’s wrong with me for twisting *my*

bullshit into an unwanted *fucking* deal, and then, then, yeah, shoving a gun into *your* face for not putting up with it?"

A badly landed kick to the sheen makes Alfie come to himself a little.

"That wasn't nice at all, Tommy," he says, shuffling closer to strip Tommy of any leverage.

He loosens his grip the same moment, letting Tommy breathe in just once before crushing their lips together and pushing his tongue unceremoniously down Tommy's throat, sealing that breath.

The struggling stops, not that Alfie held on any second of their short bruising kiss.

"Get the fuck off me," Tommy somehow manages to rasp, very helpfully fisting his hands in Alfie's shirt to prevent him from moving away. He's trembling under Alfie's touch, fighting his head more than he does Alfie's hands.

Alfie scrapes his nails along the side of Tommy's throat, and he draws a shaky inhale.

"You're positive you want this, Tom?"

Tommy can't reply. He's busy biting down on Alfie's lip when Alfie pushes a knee between his legs and kicks his ankle, forcing him to spread his stance. Nearly fucking chokes himself on Alfie's hand when he jerks forward. Silly boy. Silly, infuriating, defiant mess of a man. It's spilling from his eyes now, this sparkling anger. Cold and doomed like fucking hail in the summer.

Bloody adorable, considering how hard this *definitely unwanted* torment has got him already. Alfie presses close.

"For real, mate?" he repeats, dropping his voice, and lifts his fingers off the skin just enough to let Tommy speak without trouble. Removing the only remaining instrument of his denial. "You want me to stop? Cause's not like 'm holding you down, is it, treacle?"

Alfie's free hand travels down Tommy's body, and a stubborn "yeah" catches in Tommy's throat when Alfie palms his swelling cock roughly through the trousers. Tommy clenches his teeth, resolved to contain any sound. Breathes through his nose. Looks up at Alfie with all the cold indifference he can muster, which is impressive in its sheer presence, and refuses to be affected.

He's so set on keeping his icy exterior he completely forgets to try and push Alfie away, clutching to his shirt and stilling himself, preparing to deflect any reaction once Alfie starts moving his hand.

Alfie doesn't. He just holds Tommy's cock firmly like he owns him and delights in the way Tommy's eyes widen a fraction.

It's a fucking sight alright. A curious shiver breaks out on the back of his neck at Tommy's gaze, vulnerable under the layers of turmoil. It's a heady feeling, with power dancing on Alfie's fingertips.

“Now, Tommy, I don’t believe, right, that you really want me to get the fuck off you,” Alfie murmurs, humming approvingly when Tommy’s eyes flutter for a second as he buckles his hips just slightly. “What I think is, you aimed for a different order of those words, sweetie, didn’t ya.”

“No,” Tommy says.

“Is that right?”

“‘s right.”

“So it definitely wasn’t more of a ‘get me the fuck off,’ was it?”

Alfie moves the hand from Tommy’s throat to the messy mop of his hair and gives his cock a long lazy stroke through the fabric.

“Fucking- *no*. Oh *fuck you*-”

Tommy arches his back for a second, chasing the sensation when Alfie stops again.

There’s a crack, right in the murderous blue. Tommy’s close to something—not yet begging, not even truly accepting, but he’s past the silent rejection. His hands start failing him already, sliding down Alfie’s shirt, pausing at the abdomen where Alfie’s arm gets in the way.

It takes all the willpower to not move a muscle, but this moment, it’s strikingly easy to source patience in Tommy’s diminishing control.

If the warehouse was a black box for both of them, now the transparency of intentions is almost too much to handle. There is only one way it can go from here. Has been, ever since Alfie got in the car a few hours earlier, and he’s resolutely not letting his mind drift anywhere but down that line, because any alternative is uncomely disastrous.

He waits a second. Then another. Then, Tommy drops his eyes to Alfie’s collarbone and sinks his nails into his chest.

“Get the fuck on with it,” he chokes out, as if the very words were too bloody grand for his proud mouth.

It’s miles away from being a plea that Alfie suddenly craves, but it’s significant enough to cut it. They will get to pleading, no fucking doubt there. But first they need to get through tonight.

Alfie gives himself a second to enjoy Tommy’s expression, twisting with surprise when instead of doing as told, Alfie takes a small step back and smooths Tommy’s waistcoat for him.

“Well, seeing you’re more agreeable now, right, let me tell ya how this is gonna be. You’ll go and tell your army of maids to prepare a guest room, yeah, a nice one, to compensate for that ridiculous fucking gypo greeting-”

“Why don’t I just throw you out of my house?” Tommy cuts in, voice hoarse.

“See, mate, that’s thinking with your head, and ‘s not working out for us today. So why don’t you shut up and listen to me, hm, how ‘bout that.”

Tommy huffs, runs a hand through his hair. He’s disheveled in a way that’s almost artistic. Alfie doesn’t care enough to claim credit for once, he simply watches as Tommy goes to pick up the gun, rigid spine and flushed cheeks, and thinks it must be vaguely impossible to recreate such feral beauty.

“Don’t fucking dream,” Tommy says and shuts his mouth, and—*bloody hell*—Alfie didn’t expect him to, but now that it’s happening, he suddenly regrets letting Tommy out of his reach. Soon, he reminds himself. Fucking patience.

“Right, so you’re gonna go tend to that urgent telegram, and when Frances and the merry bunch go to sleep, I’m gonna come to your bedroom, and we’re gonna fuck that embarrassing blackout of yours away. Nice and simple.”

Tommy swipes a finger over his mouth, which must feel bruised by now, and looks up with a much more controlled fire this time.

“I won’t wait up on you like some cheap fucking whore.”

Alfie shrugs. “Wait up like an expensive one then, mate, no fucking problem. ‘Course that’s if you manage to pull it off.”

Tommy swallows the starting retort when Alfie pushes the door and strides out, not a care in the world for the group of three women, gathered across the hall. They avert their eyes with professional aptitude, lightning-fast and in perfect synchronisation, as soon as the door opens. They know about the confrontation, he can tell. They couldn’t possibly hear their hushed voices, but it still is close enough to remind Alfie why he changes his own sheets and cooks his fucking eggs. It’s impossible to live in a house with so many eyes. No wonder Tommy’s only clamming up in his time here.

Frances appears out of nowhere, and she wrinkles her nose when Tommy lights up, although she doesn’t say a word.

“The gentleman is still with us, I gather,” she notes.

Alfie observes out the corner of his eye, suddenly curious about Tommy’s indifference to such inappropriate comments. Tommy doesn’t smirk, not quite, still too winded and likely more than a little angry, but he takes a long drag and, in a moment, responds in kind.

“For this gentleman not to be, Frances, we might need an exorcist.”

“I will send a letter to your aunt tomorrow then,” she says without batting an eye.

Tommy goes silent again. Alfie listens, looking at the massive and useless picture of a landscape right in front of him, pretending not to and fooling exactly no one; partially because he and Tommy come from the same species, and Tommy knows exactly how useful

things uttered in meaningless banter can turn out to be. Also, the picture of his aunt learning he hosted none but Alfie Solomons for the night must be distressing, at the very least.

“Prepare the guest room. The second floor,” Tommy eventually orders and strolls away without sparing Alfie another look, and, well, it’s moderately warmer than Alfie expected of him, really.

“Please, follow me, sir.”

The maid leads the way, deeper into the house, and Alfie thinks for the first time this evening that sending David away was reckless.

They’re done with pointing guns at each other for now, he hopes. They better fucking be.

Hear

Chapter Notes

> There is some non-negotiated kink taking place in this chapter. Everything is 100% consensual, but they don't discuss or agree on it beforehand.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Being thrown off balance is something Tommy's intimately familiar with. He doesn't need to think about injecting nonchalance into his expression—his body starts going through the practiced and perfected motions with long-founded familiarity.

Shift the focus. Breathe. Tend to what's important.

The simple formula sets him on a short tour through the rooms, scouting for something mildly private he might've left on one of the desks. There's barely anything—with all the live-in staff, Tommy has a shallow allowance for mistakes. His documents spend the night behind several locks, and this time is no different except for the extra thoroughness that guides Tommy to tug at the drawers with a touch more diligence than he usually does.

He goes to the armoury in the study last. It sends all his instincts bellowing when he unclasps the holster and shoves the gun deep into the safe, and he turns the key while reason still outweighs panic. Locking the gun away and staying defenseless is vastly superior to waking up with a cold muzzle against his temple. It's no guarantee, but it makes them squarely disadvantaged, at least.

Because Alfie didn't come armed. Tommy knows for sure. It would've been impossible to conceal a weapon, not with the way Alfie's body was pressed to his, *into* his, as if the bloody room was shrinking, and they didn't have an inch to spare. Not with the way it will be later tonight. Jesus Christ.

What the fuck *is* he doing?

Tommy presses the heels of his palms into his eyes for a moment.

It's madness. It was bloody fucking madness to let Alfie lay his hands on him, on his fucking *throat*, and it didn't feel sane either. Tommy reaches up mindlessly, touches the burning skin on his neck. Swallows hard and feels his Adam's apple bob under his fingers.

It would be a lie to say the thought has never crossed his mind. It has. Not once, and mainly at times when the night was safe and silent after a heavy day, and Alfie Solomons, just like Tommy himself, was not a man but an idea, a possibility, an image from a different world where such fantasies had a fighting chance. Those were the times there was absolute shit to

be done with such thoughts except let his tired mind take charge and run loose with them until the morning.

Tommy wants to claim now, even to himself, he remembers little of those occasions.

He forces a sharp exhale before he exits the study and ventures to the office once again, putting the telegram Frances left on the desk into the drawer.

He tells himself it's weariness that's shaking his fingers, not anticipation.

The wood creaks beneath the carpets, framing Tommy's path to the bathroom in the unnatural silence, and he tells himself, as he sinks under the water, there wasn't any other way, with Alfie's fucking driver gone. And now, he thinks, it's not his fucking problem. He won't be the one to come for Alfie to save his life, and maybe, just maybe, Alfie won't come either. It would be simple. It would be good.

Tommy grips the edge of the tub and grits his teeth against the same bitter disappointment that shot through him three days ago at the bakery.

There was no use trying to drown it in whiskey back then, and the water fails to accomplish the task now.

He *wants* Alfie. He fucking *hates* Alfie.

It takes half an hour for angry resignation to settle in. When Tommy drops onto the bed, water is still dripping down his bare chest from the soaked hair. He leaves his trousers on. Other than that, it's sleep he's fucking waiting for, not Alfie to cross the hallway and walk three doors down to the master bedroom, so the clothes take their usual place in the closet, and the ashtray comes to sit on the bed, and Tommy resolutely studies the wall ahead rather than the door, filling the room with smoke.

He has only a minute to think about how effortlessly Alfie reversed their roles, making Tommy wait for something in his own house, before he hears measured steps in the hallway, and the door opens.

Alfie glides his gaze over the sun on Tommy's chest, doing exactly nothing to appear disinterested, and nods to something with a low hum as he goes to sit on the edge of the bed to take his boots off. The shirt follows. It ends up hanging from the backrest of the single chair, casually messy. The smoke burns Tommy's throat.

"The maids will hear," Tommy says, fighting to stifle the cough. Another inhale eases the burn a little, doesn't ease the nerves. "They always hear, I've been told."

Alfie gets in the bed and mimics Tommy, propping himself against the headboard. "They won't come close enough to hear tonight."

Tommy quirks an eyebrow. "Any reason?"

"Frances. What, you think she's just there to drop witty lines at ya?" He meets Alfie's eyes sideways, not ready to face him yet, almost grateful Alfie doesn't ask him to. "Nah, mate,

you see, she is the true ruler of this household, the puppet master with a power so uncontainable and indisputable that she can talk back to ya and walk in on ya, what will you, whenever she pleases, right, and at the end of the day, she will still be employed."

Alfie shifts the blankets around with little regard for the bed having another occupant, until he's comfortable and way closer than he was before his tossing and turning. If Tommy's shoulder comes to press against Alfie's chest as a result, it's not his damn fault.

"What's her power?" Tommy asks.

"Maids talk, right?" Alfie skims his fingers carelessly over Tommy's skin. He traces the outline of the muscles on his shoulder, forearm, and it's almost *embarrassing* how tense Tommy suddenly feels, because Alfie must sense that, and if he does, the exterior calmness that Tommy is pouring all his energy into will only work to mock him. "They see things, it's the natural order of the world, innit, no reason to deny that. But then they leave this fucking palace, right. They go out. And they bring all the stories with them."

Tommy breathes out and makes a conscious effort to relax his arm. He's rewarded with a light scrape of nails.

"Everything they saw, heard, assumed, caught a fleeting glimpse of—they tell it once, and it's flying on its own now, right, gaining momentum, until…" Alfie extends his caress to trace the fading lines of the sun, and Tommy can't fight a sharp inhale. Alfie continues, eyes glued to Tommy's face and utterly inexpressive. "It reaches the right ears. And you're done, just like that. So Frances, mate, she keeps 'em in line. Keeps all the important rumours looped 'round the house and makes 'em die before they reach the door."

Tommy stubs the cigarette out in the ashtray and immediately lights a new one. After the first drag, he finally turns to Alfie.

"You know a lot about maids. For a man who doesn't like big houses."

"Well, mate, someone's got to help you out, right, cause you know too fucking little, for a man who owns one."

Tommy stares in response. His heart is pounding against Alfie's palm. He blows the smoke in Alfie's face, grasping for a reply that won't come too close to toeing the line, to crossing into a discussion that he isn't planning to conduct. He wants to—he realizes with a pang of dread, he wants to scream into Alfie's face for being so fucking calm and sure, for being so fucking *agreeable* in the warehouse, for coming here, and laying down in Tommy's bed, and driving him crazy with his feather fucking touches.

He's one second away from speaking, and Alfie must see that, as much as they seem to share a mind right this second, because he reaches up and takes the cigarette out of Tommy's fingers, leaning over him to put it out in the ashtray. The protest that Tommy's too late to voice slides into Alfie's mouth.

He can't help stilling in surprise—*again*—perhaps looking for a hint of insecurity in Alfie, a hitch, something to give him a reason to push back, call his bluff, go back to normality. But

Alfie kisses with all the certainty in the world. He's all scratchy beard and firm moves, uncompromising and so fucking patient it makes Tommy's head spin. Alfie's infuriating, solid presence, and who would've bloody guessed—it's irresistible, completely out of bounds of Tommy's control not to give in and put his hands to use, pulling at Alfie's shoulders to bring him closer.

The hint doesn't take even a second to register. There's rolling motion and a gasp coming from his own lips, and then Tommy's trapped, fitted neatly between the mattress and the warm weight on him. It's hard to think; but for some reason, his tongue suddenly feels loose.

He bites Alfie's lip hard and tangles one hand in his hair, pulling him back with a sharp tug.

Don't, don't, don't.

He does anyway.

"Don't ever come into my house without warning again," he rasps, digging his fingers into Alfie's skull; anger intertwined with wanting so fucking tightly he can barely tell them apart. Maybe they're the same thing, with this man.

Alfie pushes against his grip to bring his face closer again, as if the pain was merely an inconvenience not worthy of his attention right now.

"Don't ever point a gun at me again, mate, how 'bout that." His tone is conversational, the ragged rising of his chest is anything but.

"'m fucking serious. That's the line. Don't you fucking cross it, Alfie."

For a second, Alfie looks like he's about to lunge forward and kiss him senseless, while there's still a thin possibility to divert the collision. Tommy slides the hand to the back of his neck, breathes in the smell of his own soap and a barely noticeable tinge of rum. Waits.

A moment passes, or a hundred of them. Alfie doesn't kiss him.

"The line? The line, yeah? You wanna discuss boundaries here, mate, that right?"

Neither of them is entitled to boundaries, not in the way they choose to live out their less than saint lives, and Tommy understands, of-fucking-course he does, but he's angry, and *hard*, and fucking lost. It's an illusion of control, but he clutches to it with both hands.

"There's nothing to discuss."

"Nothing, yeah?" Alfie grips his jaw, finally riled up enough for roughness, and Tommy lets him, as if he weren't fucking looking already. "Nothing, like what, your little stunt in the warehouse, that nothin'?" Fingers bite into his skin, and Tommy responds with a sharp press into Alfie's nape. "So what, Tommy, wanted to prove somethin' to yourself, did ya? How d'that work for you?"

"Oh, the warehouse, eh?" Tommy licks his lips. "You're expecting a fucking apology?"

Alfie stares at him. Why the fuck he's not retreating is beyond Tommy. Solomons is a reasonable man at his core, he doesn't seem to share the drive of those morons who cannot find satisfaction in simple, unbroken things. If he's got any spec of wit left, he should get up, call his fucking driver and steer clear of Tommy Shelby in all regards while they remain unfortunate enough to share a country.

So when he swings his hips down instead, throwing Tommy a condescending look, Tommy can't help the choked whine that escapes his throat.

"An apology? Nah, mate, wouldn't really want that, would I. Seeing you're clearly not sorry."

"Fuck you."

Tommy releases his neck and moves the hand to push at Alfie's chest for the two seconds it takes Alfie to catch his wrist and pin it to the bed.

"*Fuck* you-"

He struggles for a second, in the earnest, but there's nothing he can do. Alfie doesn't lift his fingers an inch, calmly holding back the irreversible demolition of any hope for the night that would follow if Tommy were to wriggle free.

"Yeah, some day, mate," he says. "If you fucking behave."

It's almost subtle how Alfie gradually pushes harder, puts enough force into it to let Tommy feel the growing pressure without crushing his hand completely. Tommy doesn't register the moment when he gives up on struggling. He stops. Just like that, with a single rough push into the sheets that wipes his mind clean. Fucking hell.

Tommy tries to move his hand experimentally and exhales sharply when there's no shift at all, Alfie's not giving an inch, and he's got no room to move, no strength to fight against Alfie's grip, he can only lie there and *take* it.

"That's right, you're going nowhere, treacle," Alfie rumbles, voice steady and heavy, and reaches for Tommy's other hand, drawing it above his head and pressing down hard. "Not until I'm done with you."

It shouldn't be compelling. It feels wrong to allow himself to be cornered. It shouldn't pull him under like an inevitable wave, and Tommy's suddenly suffocating.

"Wait," he rasps, and Alfie does—miraculously—not releasing his hands, not continuing either.

Tommy's lips feel dry and hot.

"I've never- Not like this. I don't know-"

Christ, the fuck's with the stumbling, he thinks. Licks his lips quickly, determined to try again, but words don't come, and Tommy realizes, to his horror, he's stripped naked in the

face of this insecurity, out of his domain for the first time in eternity, and he can't, he fucking *can't-*

"Yeah, yeah, shush now." Alfie takes one hand off Tommy's wrist and drapes it almost lazily over Tommy's mouth. "We won't then," he agrees easily.

It must be in the way Tommy's hand, left unrestrained on the mattress, twitches and stops short of actually moving, but everything about Alfie finally clicks together. He strokes Tommy's lip with his thumb unhurriedly. It's almost too out of place, too sharp a contrast with Tommy's racing heart when he ducks his head and starts laying kisses along the line of his neck; and yet it's working—the air gradually starts entering Tommy's lungs instead of gushing down his throat into the void.

It feels almost self-indulgent. As if Alfie's *enjoying* it.

Tommy doesn't fight it when his body goes boneless.

"Right," Alfie murmurs. Both his hands abandon contact when he props himself on his elbows, hovering over Tommy. "I recall you wanted to 'get the fuck on with it,' didn't you."

"You-"

"Shut your mouth, Tom. You will speak only if you don't like somethin', you got that?"

Who the fuck does he think he is, Tommy wonders, a little breathlessly, and opens his mouth to respond. It absolutely warrants a response, such a statement, because Tommy will do as he fucking pleases in his own bed, and Alfie can keep him fixed in place with that famished look all he likes, it won't sway a thing in his favour. Tommy may be trembling under him, but he's not *complacent*.

In a moment, Alfie nods. Tommy realizes, a little too late, he didn't utter a word.

"Yeah, 's right. You're good, sweetie. Just lie there and don't worry your pretty head about a thing."

"Fuck you," Tommy says weakly.

Alfie doesn't even seem to hear. The beard burns when he nibs at the edges of the tattoo on Tommy's chest, iterates bites and soothing licks as he travels down Tommy's torso, letting just his lips touch the skin. Tommy arches into it—can't help it. He deflected Alfie's words at the warehouse so readily, so naturally, but there's little to hold onto now, and Tommy really can't recall when there was someone who touched him so boldly and thoroughly—perhaps never, he thinks, but it can't be true because his body seems to know what it wants, ache with *missing* it.

"Shh, you're fine. Doing just fine, love. So fucking beautiful." Alfie's tone is just slightly bewildered, and Tommy forces himself to crack his eyes open—never knew he closed them.

"Get on with it," he says.

For once, Alfie doesn't argue. Tommy lifts his hips when Alfie works his belt open and tugs his trousers off before leaning back to undress himself. He looks bigger without his baggy clothes. All broad shoulders and dizzying deftness, bulky, strong, flushed from the tip of his cock to the hollow of his throat. Indecently composed.

Tommy shivers when Alfie runs his fingers down the inside of Tommy's thigh.

"Spread those legs for me, treacle."

Tommy won't. He does.

A short, quiet laugh, like the crackling of wood in the fireplace, is the only warning Alfie cares to give before he gets his mouth on Tommy's cock, and Tommy chokes on his inhale. He was so worked up a moment ago, so lost in his head, he barely noticed how aroused he was. Now he knows. Alfie's mouth, stretched open and red under his beard, slides down easily, and *Jesus fucking Christ* he's so hard he's leaking, he won't last a minute if Alfie actually puts his heart into it.

Tommy bucks his hips just to feel Alfie pinning him down effortlessly, never stopping his slow rhythm. Fuck, this is good.

He starts shifting—barely ever does, never so full of the tight, coiling heat—throwing his head back onto the pillow, rolling his hips as much as Alfie's grip allows. Alfie's methodical and relentless, and it's worse than his bursts of rage, because it goes on and on, forcing indignant sounds through Tommy's clenched teeth, as if Tommy was a fiddle out of tune. It's been long since he's received so much attention in bed.

When Tommy finally slides his hands over Alfie's shoulders, runs his fingers through his hair, tugging barely, almost asking, Alfie's gaze turns sly. He sucks hard, holding Tommy's gaze, and Tommy lets out a quiet gasp, tightening his grip. Fuck it, let him see, just catch a glimpse of it, there's nothing more to reveal through Tommy's moans than he already has with his treacherous heartbeat and a cock throbbing in Alfie's mouth.

"Fucking hell-"

He lets his legs fall apart a little further. Alfie's gaze darkens. He uses his tongue to press Tommy's cock into the roof of his mouth for a blissful second before he slides off with a wet noise, grabbing Tommy's outstretched arms to force him up, closer, almost sitting in Alfie's lap.

"No one taught you patience, did they, Tommy? Or any other virtue, for that matter." Alfie clicks his tongue.

Tommy smashes their lips together with all frustration he can channel. He can taste himself on Alfie's tongue, a noticeable heady aftertaste, almost mocking him, reminding how *close* he was just a second ago.

"I'll fuckin' kill you," Tommy mutters into Alfie's mouth, meaning it.

Alfie grips his jaw with two fingers. Tommy jerks back instinctively, but it's fruitless—Alfie's hand is steady and secure on the back of his neck.

"You're forgetting something there, love. Do you want me to stop?"

Tommy grits his teeth.

"Not my fucking business what you do, eh?"

"Hm. Right then."

He can see it coming. Almost sure Alfie's deliberately slow, just barely giving him an opportunity to deflect. It's not slow enough, Tommy tells himself when the slap lands, hot and stinging against his cheek. Alfie's not wearing his rings, Tommy notices just now; it's almost enough to shatter his defiance to think Alfie's prepared for *this*. As if Tommy would ever *want* him to-

"Let's try that again, shall we?" Same grip on the jaw. Calm eyes. "Do you want me to stop?"

"No," Tommy says. He doesn't.

Alfie nods, as if he's never expected any other answer. "So you can't control your fucking mouth then, sweetie, right? Leaves us at that. We should find a better use for that passion."

Tommy goes when Alfie presses down with a hand on his nape, doesn't have much choice but to obey. It makes him feel confident, suddenly. Loose. If it's Alfie's doing, Alfie's responsibility now, Tommy can't make a mistake.

Alfie doesn't stop when Tommy's crouched between his legs, doesn't let go until Tommy has his lips wrapped around the cockhead; he doesn't let Tommy lick experimentally, fucking stare at him contemplating, *thinking,* and Tommy lets him take this, lets his hand ground him and set the pace.

"See, so much fucking better." Alfie removes the hand from Tommy's jaw and settles it on his shoulder blade. His other hand moves to tangle in Tommy's hair. "Should've done it from the very beginning."

Tommy grips his thigh when Alfie presses his head down carefully. It's not nearly deep enough to gag, but it's still uncomfortable, his mouth raw and full, jaw aching from the strain. Tommy leans back to swallow quickly and gulp some air, and Alfie allows it for a moment before returning the pressure, pushing Tommy back down onto his cock and groaning when it slips into Tommy's throat.

Distantly, Tommy knows there's no going back from this, there is no deal and no justification, but he's too far gone to care. He's still hard, despite the cool air in the room, hard from sucking Alfie off, Jesus...

He grinds down on the bed, unable to keep from it anymore, bursting with this need, and he moans, mouth full of cock, when Alfie doesn't stop him, only folds himself over Tommy,

caging him, and slides his free hand down until he can squeeze Tommy's ass and lay a finger flat against his hole, rubbing slowly.

Tommy startles, but there's nowhere to go, he can't even see Alfie's face, tucked under him conveniently for his pleasure.

"You're okay, keep going." Alfie says, pressing a tip of his finger inside in circular motions. "Don't mind me, yeah, you're clearly quite occupied there, ain't ya."

Tommy would consider biting down, but Alfie crooks his finger, still just the tip, and Tommy stops sucking for a moment, breathing through the unfamiliar sensation. Alfie doesn't seem bothered, thrusting up into Tommy's mouth when the delay drags on.

Tommy's grateful for the cock in his mouth. He'd beg by now. He's glad he doesn't have to.

"Go on, then," Alfie says, voice sharp and ragged. "Hump the bed if you need it so."

Tommy digs his nails into Alfie's thighs as hard as he can. He gets a ringing slap on the ass for that.

"I said, get the fuck moving."

That does it. Not his choice, not his problem, not his responsibility or consequence, Tommy thinks as he brings his hips down, muffled moan escaping his lips when his cock finally finds friction between the cool sheets. It takes another few seconds before Alfie comes, quiet and trembling, and Tommy can't coordinate his limbs enough to pull off before it hits his tongue. He swallows some, some leaks out. It doesn't matter. Nothing matters when Alfie holds his hair, not letting him up and off his cock even now, and Tommy manages one, two violent thrusts before the only thing he knows is the smell of skin, and taste, and the endless ringing in his ears.

He can't feel enough of his body to start moving, so he just lies there afterwards, breathing, mind blank and fuzzy with unfamiliar lightness. At some point, Alfie scoops him in his arms, draws him up to lie against him, and Tommy lets him, lets his secure embrace and warmth give him direction until the world starts rebuilding itself.

Alfie's stroking his hair when Tommy opens his eyes.

"You with me, love?" His voice is different. Not careful—patient.

Tommy takes a breath and starts disentangling their limbs.

"Yeah."

He has to strike twice before the lighter takes mercy on his hands, still trembling faintly, and Tommy inhales as much smoke as his lungs can accommodate. He wants to get away, curl up somewhere he doesn't need to keep his face composed. He wants to get back into Alfie's arms, pillow his head on his chest and listen to the reassuring sound of his heart until he feels like himself again, whole.

Neither seems to be an option, so Tommy settles for smoking and staring—straight ahead, just like he'd been before Alfie entered the room, time twisting into a complete circle.

Slowly, breath by breath, Tommy can think again. He thinks about Alfie's voice—*hump the bed if you need it so*—and abandons this idea. Not fucking now. Preferably, not fucking ever.

"They're giving you the insurance money?" Tommy asks, carefully disinterested, and shuffles to sit higher, balancing the ashtray on his knee.

Alfie huffs. "We've had our local instance of administrative hell today. When we go, Tommy, right, well, that's gonna be goddamn awful there. Imagine spending an eternity, right, with those paper-pushers at your neck." He looks at Tommy, and Tommy returns his gaze in a few seconds. Alfie won't speak a word of the actual business tonight, Tommy knows. Too dangerous, he's too relaxed. "That's the sort of suffering for a worse grade of sinners, I say."

"When's Ishmael picking you up?"

Alfie arches an eyebrow. "Whenever I call him."

Tommy doesn't repress a sigh. Doesn't care if Alfie's eyes go amused for a moment.

"When will you call him?"

"Well, that depends entirely on my host's hospitality, innit," Alfie says. "Perhaps, he'll let me catch a ride with his Majesty to Birmingham tomorrow, right, and then I won't have to call my driver at all."

Tommy thinks about it. Doesn't make any difference, one car ride, and it won't look odd to anyone. The maids know Alfie spends the night, they also know Tommy had him on the other end of his gun this evening. They will wonder, but they won't suspect anything remotely close to the truth. For anyone in Birmingham catching a glimpse—well. Peaky Blinders are not the ones you look at for too long.

"Don't get used to it," Tommy says, confirming nothing, but Alfie still laughs, low and quiet.

"Wouldn't dream of it, mate." He looks absent for a minute, Tommy knows because he can't stop observing once he's started, eyes set on the door for a guise, Alfie's face obscured just slightly by the smoke. When he speaks again, it's easy to hear the fake nonchalance. "You'll be in London soon?"

"What does it matter?"

Nothing, Alfie will say. He will crease his brow a little further, turn away and ramble on about his visions of the divine. When neither happens, Tommy actually turns to look.

"What does it matter," Alfie repeats, as soon as he gets the direct attention. Calm, not a trace of the hot anger that possessed him in Tommy's office earlier. "What, you're gonna be bloody difficult about it now? Pretend I strolled in here by sheer fucking accident, is that it, just taking a small detour from Camden to get some air?"

Tommy opts for silence. There's no denial for him, not anymore. He's erased that option when he didn't push Alfie's hand off his neck. He doesn't know what to make of it yet, but it was pure defiance—and habit—that forced his tongue a second ago, and there's nothing more to say.

Alfie seems to catch on.

"You know, mate, if you wanna go for round two of this whole-" he gestures vaguely "-elaborate scheme, right, there's no bloody need to burn my property again."

"Skip to the bakery?" Tommy feels a hint of a smile on his aching lips. Hell, he's really fucked out of his head.

A flash of relief. Alfie tucks it away quickly. Not quickly enough.

"Yeah, somethin' like that. Just don't bring the bloody gun."

"No promises."

They won't talk, won't say anything. Alfie bloody well might try, with that grin that's curling his lips, the smug bastard, but Tommy hopes he will spare him the need to listen. He's listened for long enough now; tonight, he maybe finally heard something. It'd be a fucking shame to ruin it.

Alfie sighs by his side. Eventually, he takes the cigarette out of Tommy's hand and leans over him to turn the lamp off.

"Yeah, no promises, mate."

His forearm ends up brushing Tommy's back, and it feels like one.

Tommy sleeps that night.

Chapter End Notes

Phew... that was a ride. Big thank you to all for your loveliest comments and support!

I'm summer-jay on tumblr, come say hi if you feel like it.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!